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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (ADDING CAPTION)

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KCRM](#) [KJUS](#) [PINR](#) [EUN](#) [BK](#)
SUBJECT: BOSNIA - CAR BOMB KILLS OUTSPOKEN GOVERNMENT
CRITIC IN BANJA LUKA

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. On November 6, a car bomb killed civil servant Milan Vukelic in Banja Luka. According to media reports, Vukelic was an outspoken critic of the government and had been the target of attacks in the past. Unknown perpetrators burned his vehicle and set fire to his mother's house in separate incidents earlier this year. This latest incident will likely heighten tensions and further discourage dissent aimed at the government. END SUMMARY.

Car Bomb Kills RS Civil Servant

¶2. (SBU) A car bomb killed civil servant Milan Vukelic at 8:45 PM on November 6 while he was driving his vehicle through Banja Luka, the capital of Republika Srpska (RS) - an entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). The attack also injured the two passengers who were riding in the vehicle, who were reportedly associated with a cafe owned by the victim. Vukelic was a civil engineer employed by the Banja Luka construction institute (BLCI), a state-owned company that supervises construction projects on behalf of the city administration, including the issuance of permits and collection of fees.

¶3. (SBU) We have heard unconfirmed speculations that the bomb was remotely detonated, indicating a sophisticated and targeted attack; but also that it was on a timer, and not intended to kill. We have no police information on the results of the investigation to date. This is the first such incident in Banja Luka since the 1999 car bomb attack on Zeljko Kopanja, the owner of Banja Luka daily Nezavisne Novine, in which Kopanja lost both of his legs.

Victim had received "Warnings"

¶4. (SBU) Vukelic had complained to the RS police about death threats in the past, and even appeared on the local television show "Unsolved Cases," publicly stating that he received death threats and was the victim of earlier attacks. According to Vukelic's statements, his car was burned in May 2007 and a house belonging to his family was set alight in August 2007. No one was injured in those incidents. During the program, Vukelic described his allegations against the director of the BLCI. He also claimed that RS police advised him not to pursue investigation of these matters, saying it could lead to, "further threats."

15. (SBU) Speculation is rampant in the BiH media about motivations behind the attack. Some have portrayed Vukelic as a whistle blower who was attempting to expose irregularities in city government procurement and contracting. Others, including, Vlado Jovanic, chief of the special investigation unit (SIU) of the RS police, say that the victim was closely involved with local "mafia", and received kickbacks through his work issuing construction permits. Another theory involves a property dispute related to the victim's cafe.

16. (SBU) Several of our media contacts told us that Vukelic was the main source of information related to corruption allegations against the RS government over construction projects. In particular, Vukelic allegedly provided information related to Integral Engineering, a company with close ties to RS prime minister Milorad Dodik, that is currently working on two highly controversial projects: the construction of the new RS government building and the Banja Luka/Gradiska highway. We heard that Vukelic provided information to the Banja Luka-based weekly magazine Patriot, the only major media opposition to the government, related to those projects. Patriot has reported that Vukelic filed criminal charges against BLCI director Cedo Savic for corruption, including blackmail and abuse of office.

RS Police Label this a "Terrorist Attack"

17. (SBU) According to media reports, Head of RS criminal police administration Gojko Vasic called the incident an,

"organized terrorist attack... most likely carried out by professionals", and said that the RS Ministry of Interior (MUP) will "do everything to find the perpetrators." Vasic confirmed that Vukelic complained of death threats and asked for MUP protection, but added that RS law does not allow police to authorize protection on the basis of threats alone.

Vasic also confirmed that Vukelic had submitted criminal charges to the RS MUP, the RS prosecutor's office and the BiH federal SIPA police, alleging criminal activity at the BLCI. Jovanic told amcit ICITAP senior advisor Robert Arce that the investigation will be extremely sensitive, especially if it gets too close to high-level RS political figures. We hear that the investigation will be lead by the RS prosecutor's office.

Comment

18. (SBU) COMMENT. It is too early to determine whether the murder of Vukelic resulted from his alleged involvement with organized crime figures or whether there is a political connection. However, the case will likely have a stifling effect on anyone who might consider speaking out against corruption in the RS. The apparent lack of concern exhibited by the RS police in light of earlier threats is also troubling. Although media commentators have highlighted that the murder of Vukelic could serve to protect PM Dodik's interests, such a conclusion is premature. END COMMENT.
ENGLISH